

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 2817

EXDIS

FOR ASST SECRETARY ATHERTON FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, AF, IRAN
SUBJECT: AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS --SECRETARY'S PLANNED
VISIT TO IRAN

1. DURING SECRETARY VANCE'S TALKS WITH THE SHAH IN MID-MAY, I STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT THE SECRETARY ATTEMPT TO BROADEN THE SHAH'S TOLERANCE FOR AFGHANISTAN AND PRESIDENT DAOUD -- ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO CURRENT AFGHAN BEHAVIOR OVER THE USE OF THE HELMAND WATERS -- IN THE INTEREST OF IRANIAN/U.S. LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES IN THE REGION AND VIS-A-VIS THE SOVIET UNION.

2. BACKGROUND: AFGHAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DIFFICULT. IRANIANS TEND TO LOOK DOWN ON AFGHANS AS COUNTRY COUSINS. AFGHANS, FEELING THE WEIGHT OF IRANIAN WEALTH AND GREATER POWER, TEND TO GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR OWN "MACHISMO," THEIR INDEPENDENCE FROM THE PERSIANS.

THE AGE-OLD RIVALRY BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IS NOW CLOSE TO THE BOILING POINT OVER THE ISSUE OF THE USE OF THE HELMAND WATERS.
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THIS ISSUE IS A REAL OLD CHESTNUT BUT THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY CENTERS ON A TREATY NEGOTIATED IN THE EARLY 1970'S WHICH THE IRANIANS HAD HOPED WOULD GIVE THEM ACCESS TO SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF HELMAND RIVER WATER. THE AFGHANS, ON THE OTHER HAND, NEGOTIATED A CAP (26 CUBIC METERS PER SECOND) ON THE WATER TO BE ALLOCATED TO IRAN, AND EVEN THOUGH THEY DO NOT NOW NEED WATER IN EXCESS OF THAT AMOUNT, THE AFGHANS ARE STUBBORNLY TAKING MEASURES

-- SPECIFICALLY THEY ARE PLANNING TO BUILD THE KAMAL KHAN DAM, A WATER CONTROL DEVICE -- SO THAT EXCESS WATER WILL BE RETAINED IN AFGHANISTAN RATHER THAN FLOWING INTO IRAN. THE AFGHANS SAY THIS WATER WILL IN DUE COURSE BE USED FOR IRRIGATION; THE IRANIANS SAY THE DAM WILL CAUSE SERIOUS ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE TO IRAN.

THE IRANIANS HAVE REACTED TO THIS AFGHAN PLOY BY WITHHOLDING AID COMMITMENTS. THE SHAH HAS LET IT BE KNOWN THAT HE IS "ANGRY" WITH AFGHAN INTRANSIGENCE AND THE AFGHANS REGARD HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S ATTITUDE AS "INSULTING AND PETTY."

THE RESULT OF THIS IMBROGLIO COMBINED WITH OTHER RECENT AFGHAN/IRANIAN HASSLES OVER ILLEGAL AFGHAN MIGRANT LABOR, THE SHAH'S IRRITATION THAT DAOUD FAILED PUBLICLY TO COMMEMORATE LAST YEAR'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY, AND PERSONALITY CLASHES AMONG TOP OFFICIALS ON BOTH SIDES, HAS BEEN TO CREATE A MOOD OF PETULANT HOSTILITY ON BOTH SIDES.

IF THESE AFGHAN/IRANIAN PROBLEMS CONTINUE, THERE WILL BE A FALL-OUT AFFECTING U.S. OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN: FAILURE BY IRAN TO KEEP AID FLOWING MAY ALREADY HAVE COST TWO U.S. COMPANIES A \$50 MILLION CEMENT PLANT CONTRACT; AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN WOULD BE HARD ON THE THIN FABRIC OF AFGHANISTAN'S PRESENT MODEST PROSPERITY AND INTERNAL STABILITY; A TURNING AWAY FROM IRAN WILL INCREASE THE DANGER OF FURTHER AFGHAN DEPENDENCE ON THE SOVIET UNION. (IT WAS PRECISELY TO REDUCE THIS DEPENDENCE THAT IRAN ORIGINALLY PROMISED ITS AID. WE APPLAUDED THIS.)

3. RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE SECRETARY, WITHOUT GIVING THE APPEAR-CONFIDENTIAL

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ANCE OF GETTING INTO THE MIDDLE OF AFGHAN-IRAN DIFFERENCES, EXPRESS IN THE CONTEXT OF JOINT AMERICAN-IRANIAN INTEREST IN SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIA, THE HOPE TO THE SHAH THAT AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN COMPOSE THEIR DIFFERENCES.

AS THE LARGER, RICHER NATION, IT IS OUR PERCEPTION THAT THE IRANIANS MAY HAVE TO BEAR THE BURDEN OF "STATESMANSHIP" ALTHOUGH WE REALIZE THIS WILL BE DIFFICULT IN THE FACE OF GRATUITOUS AFGHAN NEEDLES SUCH AS THE KAMAL KHAN DAM AND WHAT MUST BE SEEN BY THE IRANIANS AS INGRATITUDE FOR GENEROUS OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE TO DAOUD'S NEW GOVERNMENT IN 1974 AND 1975.

NEVERTHELESS, IT WOULD SEEM TO BE IN THE IRANIAN INTEREST TO BE SOMEWHAT MORE ACCOMMODATING TO AFGHAN SENSITIVITIES IN ORDER TO TIE AFGHANISTAN CLOSER TO THE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD. ALSO THE SHAH MIGHT BE RESPONSIVE TO THE ARGUMENT THAT AN INTERRUPTION IN THE FLOW OF IRANIAN DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN COULD UPSET THE PRESENT INTERNAL STABILITY OF AFGHANISTAN AND MAKE THE COUNTRY MORE VULNERABLE TO UNREST AND CONSEQUENT MISCHIEF-

MAKING BY THE RUSSIANS. AT A MINIMUM, I WOULD HOPE THE SHAH
COULD BE PERSUADED TO UNLINK THE HELMAND WATERS PROBLEM FROM OTHER
ASPECTS OF HIS AFGHAN POLICY, NOTABLY AID.

4. A COPY OF THIS MESSAGE IS BEING SENT TO EMBASSY TEHRAN FOR
ANY COMMENT IT MIGHT HAVE.
ELIOT

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